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THE ARTIST AND ART INSTRUCTION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS ♣ BY JOHN S. CLARK



HE future of Art in America depends largely on the elementary Art instruction given in the public schools. This elementary instruction, given alike to those who are to produce works of fine art and industrial art, and to those who are to constitute an appreciative public for the work of the artist and the artisan, becomes thus a matter of deep social importance. The artist should take the heartiest interest in the present great movement for art instruction in public schools. He should treat the movement as something deserving thoughtful study.

He can be positively helpful only when his criticism and recommendations are based on a thorough understanding of the actual and necessary conditions to which the art instruction in the public schools must conform.

Now what are these conditions which cannot be ignored in any practical plan of public art instruction?

I. The instruction in primary and grammar schools must be given in the ordinary class-rooms.

Desirable as specially arranged art rooms or studios would be, it is absolutely impossible to secure them while in every large city, every year, thousands of children cannot get any education at all, because there is not sufficient school room yet provided to give them all seats, and while the most liberal appropriations for buildings are yet far short of the school needs. Under such conditions to demand special rooms or studios for the art instruction would result in getting the subject thrown out of the schools entirely.

II. The instruction in these grades must be class instruction and not purely personal or individual instruction.

Desirable as it might be to have all the art instruction strictly individual, class instruction is absolutely necessary on account of the limitations of the teaching force. Sixty children in one room, with a twenty-minute or half-hour period for the lesson, could not possibly be given purely individual instruction unless at least six instructors could have charge of the lesson. If each school were to have only three such twenty-minute lessons per week, a city with a thousand such schools (Boston has nearly fifteen hundred) would require an additional force of at least three hundred special art instructors to teach art alone in grades below the high school. The mere statement of this fact shows that individual art instruction is wholly impracticable. The pupils must be grouped in the usual classes for instruction. There is no other way possible.

III. The art instruction must be given by the regular grade teachers.

School programmes are so crowded with subjects that an isolated study, one which is taught entirely by itself, apart from any bearing on the other studies, can expect little educational favor and little opportunity for healthy development. If art instruction is to amount to anything in these crowded school programmes, its practical character must be clearly shown, and it must be intimately related in every grade with the rest of the school work. This means that the art idea must be clearly presented, and that the instruction in its various processes of modeling, drawing, and painting must be of such a character that these processes may be practically utilized as means of expression in other studies, thereby not only helping those other studies, but also helping the art study through the skill gained by the supplementary practice. It is true that departmental teaching is now and then suggested as desirable for the public schools, but, on the whole, this departmental plan, which makes each teacher a specialist in one or two subjects and keeps the subjects themselves comparatively unrelated to each other, has small prospect of favor, especially since its tendency is practically in

direct opposition to the great popular movement for correlation and unification of studies. The public schools are not yet largely inclined to the plan of departmental teaching. Under these conditions it is evident that the regular grade teacher is the one, and the only one, who can keep the art study in right, mutual relations to the other studies. The most difficult point to be overcome in the whole problem is here—How to qualify the class teacher. Yet this difficulty is being overcome, as the public school work in many cities can show.

IV. The work must be definitely and systematically laid out and efficiently supervised.

It would be idle to expect the average grade teacher, with her crowded programmes, her limited understanding of what art means, and her limited knowledge of technique, to conduct the work intelligently on mere general recommendations. Not only must the class teacher be trained, but the course of art instruction through all the grades must be laid out definitely and systematically by persons thoroughly familiar with the principles and methods both of art and of education. Broadness of mind as well as a thorough knowledge of education and of art are necessary for this task. It is not enough to understand art. It is necessary also to understand the ways in which children's minds develop (ways which cannot always be predicted from experience with adults in the studio). It is not enough to understand psychology and pedagogy. It is necessary also to have such a grasp of art history, art ideas, and art methods as to be able to impart both knowledge and inspiration to the whole corps of grade teachers, and then all this varied knowledge must be combined with wide practical experience in public school work. Hence the need of well-trained and experienced art educational supervisors for public school work.

As has already been said, the artist should be both ready and able to help on this work. If his efforts have hitherto not always been helpful, it is chiefly because he has either misunderstood or ignored the fundamental conditions just pointed out. As an instance in point I may be permitted to cite Mr. Douglas Volk of the Art Students' League, New York, and the Cowles Art School, Boston, a distinguished artist and teacher, who has recently published a pamphlet* on art instruction in public schools which is endorsed by several eminent artists in New York. Mr. Volk in this pamphlet exhibits a very earnest desire to improve existing methods of public school work. I feel sure that such an attitude on his part will cause him to welcome friendly discussion of his main points in the light of public school conditions.

I can here deal only with Mr. Volk's main propositions. He starts with the assumption that public school art instruction should be given,

- a) individually, not in classes,
- b) by special art instructors,
- c) in special art rooms or studios.

In a word, Mr. Volk would carry the method of the studio directly into the public schools. But we have already seen that the actual public school conditions which have to be faced the moment we attempt to carry any scheme into practical effect make the terms he demands utterly impracticable.

Further, Mr. Volk, owing to an unfamiliarity with pedagogical considerations, common among artists, fails to see the vital importance of having the art instruction related to other branches of school work. Accordingly he sees no use for the geometric types of form. He grants their usefulness in connection with mechanical or constructive drawing, but he thinks they have nothing to do with art or art instruction.

* "Art Instruction in the Public School: by Douglas Volk."

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He seems here to overlook the fundamental importance of form study, that is, the study of pure form, in general education, and the desirability, the advantage, not only of utilizing the form study in art work, but also of integrating the art instruction through the form study with other lines of work. All objects in nature have form, all the objective works of man have form. Form knowledge, that is, a knowledge of pure form, is essential for correct thinking, either of natural objects or artificial objects. In all industrial construction, particularly, a definite mental concept of form combined with a power of creative imagination based on exact knowledge of form is indispensably necessary.

It is not at all true, therefore, that the intrinsic value of the study of geometric types or ideals of pure form is limited to constructive drawing. The development of form imagination, that is, power to imagine form, is educationally as indispensable in pictorial drawing as in constructive drawing. Although this study of the types has been woefully misunderstood and misinterpreted by ignorant and ill-trained teachers, it is, when rightly handled, one of the best available means for training the imagination to conceive form, and also for training the immature minds of children to accurate form observation and clear-headed distinctions as well as sensible judgment about form-appearance. Ideas of harmonious proportion and leading principles of freehand perspective can be easily and intelligently developed with the aid of type-models, in a public school class with all its disadvantages, while the development of the same ideas and principles with all sorts of different objects simultaneously before the class, would be absolutely impossible under the conditions and in the time allowed.

As a matter of fact, the intelligently guided study of type-models in the hands of each individual pupil does in itself make elementary art instruction much more individual in its character than artists realize. "Class" instruction by a good teacher by no means implies the pupils' taking form information by hearsay. It means personal study by each child of what is for the time being exclusively his own model. The fact that his classmates are at the same time studying models exactly like his does not make the teacher's questions, directions, and explanations any less pertinent to his own needs. The fear that individuality will be destroyed by working in a class is a common but ill-grounded fear. Observation of the results of good public schools shows that individuality is not killed but developed through work in direct association with others. Class instruction need not produce a dead uniformity of results, as people sometimes imagine; on the contrary, well conducted public schools today do better educational service than average private schools do, in developing individual capacities and powers.

Again, a proper amount of study and drawing from type models

(along with drawing from nature and from good art examples in the round and from the flat) is practically found to furnish the only successful means for securing in public school classes intelligent expression in regard to form-appearance; for, while the teacher may not be able to convince the pupil that some careless or wildly erratic drawing of a leafy spray or an object of subtle proportions is untruthful, it is possible to point out definitely the imperfection of a drawing of a cylindric or conic or pyramidal model, because the rendering of proportion, of form, of position, line, light, etc., can be readily and intelligently compared with the model. I am ready to admit that exact drawing of type models produces results that are not always of themselves things of beauty, and that this kind of model drawing should be limited; but it should not be discarded. Drill exercises in this exact, provable kind of work are as necessary in elementary art instruction as drill on scales and "five-finger exercises" are in musical instruction. Only on such a conscientious, intelligent basis can any worthy aesthetic structure be hoped for when dealing with average public school children. I admit that this drill work with models is often overdone. It should be not discarded, but supplemented by more artistic work. The great public school problem today among progressive educators and teachers is, How can the various school studies best be related to each other so as to form one consistent and intelligible whole? Art instruction rightly presented should be of the greatest practical assistance in solving this problem. Its basis of form study is a basis which it shares with all studies which have to do with material things, and its processes of modeling, drawing, and painting are processes immediately available as a means of expression in all other studies that have to do with material things. To throw away form studies would be not only to leave the art instruction itself without any firm foundation, but also to abandon those other lines of thought and work along which art instruction might be most immediately helpful to general education. We cannot afford to under-value the form study. We need rather to emphasize it.

I cannot stop to discuss, I can only emphasize the importance of having the Art instruction and the Manual Training instruction in the public schools in harmony. These two movements have much in common. They both require the study of type models. Both require the constant exercise of the creative imagination. There is great need of more Art in our Manual Training instruction.

It seems hardly probable that Mr. Volk can have meant that the schools should take seriously his proposal that the first drawing done by public school children should be sketching from Indian and Aztek relics. Considering the immensely superior beauty and significance of examples of great art like that of Egypt, Greece and Rome, and the world of the Middle Ages, with its endlessly suggestive historic

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associations and its vital relations to all the great literature of the past, I fail to see the object in asking the schools to turn aside from the art that is so near to us, and set children to studying the scanty remains of a people whose curious arts, while of great interest to the ethnologist, have so little traceable connection with the great currents of civilization, are so remote from all association with the world's literature, and altogether are so far removed from the interest of young minds. Over and above the superior beauty of classic and mediaeval art, the aesthetic appeal of any bit of ancient art is greatly strengthened for children by association with tradition, story, poetry. It is impracticable to ignore the child in the matter. His tastes and interests are by no means the only things to be considered, still they should be considered. It will not do to leave them out. Or, again, if beauty and accessibility were to be our main point, there are today available in very inexpensive form, large quantities of really exquisite vases of Japanese and even American ware, which are being gradually introduced into the schools for children to study and draw.

A slight consideration of this question of public art education shows that its solution is a serious problem. It is a problem which cannot be solved off-hand.

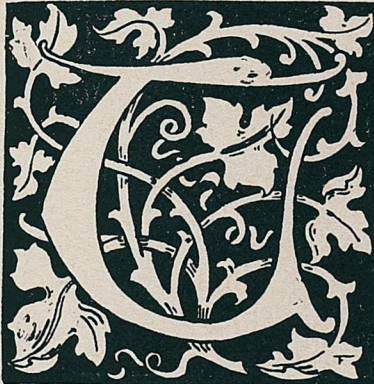
Meanwhile the artist can greatly aid in its solution. He can help demonstrate (as is already being done by Mr. Ross Turner, by the Public School Art League, and by the Chicago Central Art Association) the desirability of improving the daily surroundings of school children, of making the public school rooms beautiful with harmoniously tinted walls and well chosen casts and photographs of the world's art treasures. He can help make tax-payers see the immense economic advantages of good taste among the people, resulting in a higher standard of industrial production. He can help to make clear to teachers and the public the three distinctive lines of art work, and the respective uses and principles of each, and how they should be presented in the instruction, that is, the Constructive Arts, the Representative or Pictorial Arts, and the Decorative Arts. In order to criticise justly and profitably he should familiarize himself with the work of some of the best Art Supervisors engaged in the public schools.

It is a great task that is before us, and the educator and the artist need to understand each other better. The Art idea and its development under present school conditions are but two sides of one great educational question. The educator is prone to look upon art as simply a name for such modeling, drawing, and painting as can be done incidentally and as a graphic means of expression in the service of the common branches. Few educators have the idea of Art as being the supreme and most comprehensive form of human activity,—that form of creative activity into which knowledge and power flow for

their ultimate realization. The artist on the other hand usually sees only his subject and ignores both the pedagogical needs and the school room conditions. Both sides must be carefully considered.

When the full significance of Art and of our public school opportunity for general art culture is completely understood, I believe it will be seen that those very school conditions which sometimes seem to hamper true art instruction (the necessity for the teaching of whole classes in ordinary school-rooms by regular teachers) are precisely the conditions that properly utilized will ensure the broad art development which the country needs:—that is, a development of knowledge, feeling, and creative skill in art lines which can be naturally and habitually applied to all the pupil's future work. I believe it is on the basis of some such universal, elementary art culture as the public school can give, and only on such a basis, that we can expect that ultimate development of American art which artists and art lovers unite in desiring.

A DRAWING BY RAPHAEL ♣ BY J. M. BOWLES



THE drawing by Raphael on the next page is one of half a dozen which contain for me the essence of his art. I can look unmoved on photographs from a score of his Madonnas only to be suddenly charmed by one of Braun's remarkable fac-similes of a sketch like this. All the sweetness and tenderness of Raphael's personality is revealed to us in this graceful, charming drawing. To those who grow to care for them, what is finer than these first free sketches? In their unconscious sincerity is a lightness and a strength which are not always found in the more laboriously worked up canvases. What is the reason? Is it the actual labor involved in the greater effort, and because a man cannot work long at a time at concert pitch, or is it the difference between unconscious and conscious effort? Nowadays, probably more people than would admit it feel that many of Raphael's sketches have an artistic value which does not appear in his finished pictures. This applies not only to Raphael, but to many others of the old masters. Da Vinci openly preferred his drawings to his paintings, and left hundreds of sketches and drawings, while his completed paintings can be counted on the fingers of one hand. He hated to execute pictures. The sketch is spontaneous, free, the first impression of the artistic eye. It makes the circuit of the eye, soul, and hand so quickly that in the result little is lost to us. Why, then, is this not a finished work of art? A work of art is finished when it causes in us the same emotion the artist felt, that keen pleasure that beauty gives. The Japanese know this better than we. Their masterpieces seem slight and incomplete to us, but possibly they are made for more sensitive eyes than ours.

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